

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 06020 01 OF 02 161221Z

12

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

OMB-01 CU-02 SCCT-01 OPR-02 SY-05 PC-01 SIL-01 LAB-04

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R 161129Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 284

INFO COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 6020

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PGOV TH

SUBJECT: PLANNED DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST A CONTINUED U.S.

MILITARY PRESENCE

SUMMARY: ACTIVITIES BY STUDENTS OPPOSING A CONTINUED U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND CONTINUE TO INCREASE. INTEREST REMAINS LOW AMONG STUDENTS AS A WHOLE, LABOR, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THE NSCT FACES SEVERAL OBSTACLES TO ITS EFFORTS TO MOUNT A DEMONSTRATION ON MARCH 20, INCLUDING REFUSAL BY THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO USE CAMPUS TO ORGANIZE ACTIVITIES, AND OPPOSITION FROM VOCATIONAL STUDENT GROUPS. IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL AT THIS TIME THAT THERE WILL BE ANY LARGE DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THE U.S. THERE REMAINS SOME DANGER OF POSSIBLE VIOLENCE INVOLVING STUDENT GROUPS BACKED BY VARIOUS ELEMENTS WITHIN THE RTG. END SUMMARY.

1. ACTIVITIES BY LEFTIST STUDENTS OPPOSED TO A CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN THAILAND CONTINUE TO INCREASE SLOWLY IN INTENSITY, ALTHOUGH IT IS STILL UNCLEAR WHAT FORM THEY WILL TAKE ON MARCH 20. THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) AND OTHER LEFTIST STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN PLANNING DEMONSTRATIONS FOR THAT DATE AND ARE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 06020 01 OF 02 161221Z

MAKING AN EFFORT TO BUILD UP SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITION,

ESPECIALLY AMONG OTHER STUDENTS AND LABOR GROUPS. THERE APPEARS, HOWEVER, TO BE LITTLE INTEREST AMONG LABOR GROUPS AT THIS POINT IN THE NSCT ACTIVITIES, AND WHILE SOME LABOR LEADERS MIGHT FEEL PRESSURED INTO PLEDGING SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENTS, THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD AT THIS TIME OF ACTIVE LABOR INVOLVEMENT.

2. INTEREST AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS APPEARS TO BE ONLY MODERATE SO FAR. THE NSCT STAGED ITS FIRST RALLY ON MARCH 15 AT THE SANAM LUANG OPPOSITE THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY, AND NEWSPAPERS REPORTED ONLY 4,000 PEOPLE, MOSTLY STUDENTS, SHOWED UP. NO EMBASSY OBSERVERS WERE PRESENT, BUT THAI NEWSPAPERS GENERALLY OVERESTIMATE CROWDS BY TWO TIMES OR MORE. EVEN IF THE FIGURE OF 4,000 IS ACCURATE, HOWEVER, IT STILL REPRESENTS ONLY A SMALL FRACTION OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BANGKOK. (COMMENT: THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 60,000 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS STUDYING IN BANGKOK, WHICH MEANS THAT ABOUT 6 PERCENT OF THEM ATTENDED THE RALLY ON MARCH 15, IF NEWSPAPER FIGURES ARE CORRECT). INTEREST AMONG MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC APPEARS TO BE EVEN LOWER THAN AMONG STUDENTS.

3. ASIDE FROM APATHY, THE NSCT FACES SEVERAL OTHER DIFFICULT OBSTACLES. ALTHOUGH NSCT HEADQUARTERS IS NOMINALLY AT MAHIDON UNIVERSITY, AND ITS PERMANENT OFFICES ARE ON RACHADAMNOEN AVENUE, THEIR ACTIVITIES ALMOST ALWAYS CENTER AROUND THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY. IT IS WELL LOCATED AND OPPOSITE THE LARGE SANAM LUANG, AN IDEAL SITE FOR RALLIES (THERE ARE USUALLY LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE THERE, ESPECIALLY ON WEEKENDS WHEN THERE IS A MARKET SET UP ON THE GROUNDS, AND RALLIES ALMOST ALWAYS ATTRACT CURIOUS PASSERSBY). THAMMASAT WAS ALSO A CENTER OF THE 1973 PROTESTS WHICH HELPED TO TOPPLE THE GOVERNMENT OF THANOM KITTTHIKHACHON, AND IS THUS AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL FOR ACTIVISTS WHO LIKE TO CLAIM AN OVERLY LARGE SHARE OF THE CREDIT FOR THAT EVENT. LAST WEEK THE RECTOR OF THAMMASAT, DR. PUAU UNPHAKON, HANDED THE NSCT AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE WHEN HE ORDERED THAT NO UNIVERSITY FACILITIES BE USED TO ORGANIZE OR STAGE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 06020 01 OF 02 161221Z

ANTI-US RALLIES. A DELEGATION FROM THE NSCT THAT MET WITH PUAU ON MARCH 14 FAILED TO CHANGE PUAU'S MIND. IN MAKING HIS DECISION PUBLIC, PUAU STATED THAT HE FELT THAT PLANNED ACTIVITIES WOULD DISRUPT EXAMS, BUT HE IS KNOWN TO FEEL THAT STUDENT EXCESSES IN THE PAST HAVE DAMAGED THAMMASAT'S PRESTIGE AMONG THE PUBLIC, AND MADE IT A FOCUS OF ATTENTION OF HOSTILE RIGHT WING ELEMENTS. HE APPEARS DETERMINED TO HALT THIS TREND.

4. COLORFUL (AND REPORTEDLY EXPENSIVE) ANTI-AMERICAN POSTERS HAVE BEEN PUT UP BY STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN THE SANAM LUANG AREA OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS, KEYED TO THE DATE OF MARCH 20. EMBOFF WHO LOOKED THEM OVER MARCH 16 NOTED THAT A NUMBER OF POSTERS PASTED ON WALLS HAD BEEN DEFACED OR TORN. THERE WERE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS MARCH 16 THAT ARMY PERSONNEL HAD TAKEN SOME SIGNS DOWN. NUMBER OF SIGNS WERE OBSERVED DISMANTLED AND LEANING AGAINST WALL OF THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY. ALL THAT CAN BE CONCLUDED AT THIS POINT IS THAT STUDENT LEFTISTS DO NOT REPEAT NOT HAVE FIELD TO THEMSELVES.

5. POTENTIALLY THE MOST DEBILITATING OBSTACLE FACING THE NSCT IS THE THREAT BY RIGHT WING BACKED VOCATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS TO OPPOSE ACTIVELY NSCT EFFORTS TO HOLD DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THE US. BECAUSE OF THESE THREATS, AND ALSO A GENERAL FEAR OF TRIGGERING A STRONG MILITARY REACTION, THE NSCT HAS BEEN EXTREMELY CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY SUGGESTION OF CONFRONTATION OR VIOLENCE IN ITS STATEMENTS. IT HAS MADE AN EFFORT TO REACH AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE VOCATIONAL STUDENTS. (SUCH AN ACCOMMODATION WAS SUPPOSEDLY REACHED ON MARCH 14. HOW EFFECTIVE IT WILL BE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.) STUDENT ACTIVISTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO FEEL INTIMIDATED BY SUCH THREATS.

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 06020 02 OF 02 161226Z

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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CONFIDENTIAL FINAL SECTION OF 2 BANGKOK 6020

6. IT SEEMS FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT STUDENT ACTIVISTS AS WELL AS OPPOSING VOCATIONAL STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING AT LEAST SOME ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM VARIOUS RTG ELEMENTS. VOCATIONAL STUDENTS ARE KNOWN TO RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM CONSERVATIVE THAI MILITARY AND CIVILIAN BUREAUCRATIC ELEMENTS. NSCT LEADERS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY CLOSE TO A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS LATELY, MOSTLY NOTABLY PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT, WHO MET WITH THEM ON MARCH 13 AT HIS HOME AND CAME CLOSE TO ANNOUNCING PUBLICLY HIS SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENTS' PLANS. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS ALSO APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN RATHER RECEPTIVE TO NSCT VIEWS RECENTLY, AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE INDICATING THAT THE MFA MAY BE USING THE STUDENTS TO BOLSTER ITS POSITION WITHIN THE RTG.

7. IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL AT THIS TIME THAT LEFTIST STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO AMOUNT ANY SPECTACULAR DEMONSTRATIONS ON MARCH 20. IF A STRONG RIGHT WING THREAT DEVELOPS, THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO MOUNT ANY DEMONSTRATIONS AT ALL. A POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION WILL COME ON MARCH 17, WHEN VOCATIONAL STUDENTS LEADERS WILL GO TO NSCT HEADQUARTERS TO DEMAND HALF OF THE STUDENT FUNDS COLLECTED FROM THE

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 06020 02 OF 02 161226Z

PUBLIC IN OCTOBER, 1973, A FULL ACCOUNTING OF FUNDS SPENT SO FAR, AND THE USE OF OFFICE SPACE AT NSCT HEADQUARTERS. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT NSCT LEADERS WILL GIVE IN TO THESE DEMANDS AND IMPLIED THREATS OF VIOLENCE. BUT THE REAL DANGER IN THESE CONFRONTATIONS IS THAT OPPOSING STUDENT GROUPS MAY BECOME PAWNS IN THE HANDS OF OPPOSING GROUPS OF RTG OFFICIALS. THE ISSUE OF THE U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL HAS ALREADY BECOME OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE TO SOME OF THESE ELEMENTS, AND THE PRIMARY DISPUTE HAS BECOME ONE OVER INFLUENCE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND BUREAUCRACY.

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